

Super-Jucariile dureaza toata vara

Brian Wilson Aldiss

I

In gradina doamnei Swinton era intotdeauna vara. Minunatii migdali stateau acolo vesnic infrunziti. Monica Swinton a cules un trandafir galben ca sofranul si i l-a aratat lui David. "Nu-i asa ca e minunat?" a spus ea.

David s-a uitat in sus la ea si a scrasnit din dinti fara sa-i raspunda. Apucand floarea, a fugit cu ea prin iarba si a disparut dupa cotet unde cositoarea se ploconea, gata sa tunda sau sa mature sau sa se rostogoleasca cand momentul dicta. Statea singura pe poteca impecabila din pietris artificial.

A incercat sa-l iubeasca.

Cand s-a hotarat sa-l urmeze pe baiat, l-a gasit in curte tinand trandafirul in piscina. Statea in piscina captivat, inca purtand sandalele.

"David, dragule, trebuie sa fii atat de ingrozitor? Intra imediat si schimba-ti pantofii

Super-Toys Last All Summer Long

Brian Wilson Aldiss

I

In Mrs. Swinton's garden, it was always summer. The lovely almond trees stood about it in perpetual leaf. Monica Swinton plucked a saffron-colored rose and showed it to David. "Isn't it lovely?" she said.

David looked up at her and grinned without replying. Seizing the flower, he ran with it across the lawn and disappeared behind the kennel where the mowervator crouched, ready to cut or sweep or roll when the moment dictated. She stood alone on her impeccable plastic gravel path.

She had tried to love him.

When she made up her mind to follow the boy, she found him in the courtyard floating the rose in his paddling pool. He stood in the pool engrossed, still wearing his sandals.

"David, darling, do you have to be so awful? Come in at once and change your shoes

si sosetele."

A mers cu ea in casa fara sa protesteze, capul lui intunecat leganandu-se la nivelul taliei ei. La varsta de trei ani, nu arata nici un fel de frica pentru uscatorul ultrasonice din bucatarie. Dar inainte ca mama lui sa ia o pereche de papuci, s-a strecurat de acolo si a disparut in linistea casei.

Il cauta probabil pe Teddy.

Monica Swinton, douazeci si noua de ani, cu un corp gratios si ochi jucausi, a mers si a stat in camera de zi, aranjandu-si crengutele cu gust. La inceput statea si se gande; in curand doar statea. Timpul astepta si se misca cu o incetineala maniaca rezervata pentru copii, nebuni si sotiile ale caror soti sunt plecati sa imbunatateasca lumea. Aproape din reflex s-a intins si a schimbat frecventa ferestrelor. Gradina a disparut; in locul ei, centrul orasului s-a inaltat spre mana ei stanga, plin de oameni inghesuiti, dirijabili, si cladiri (dar a lasat sonorul incet). A ramas singura. O lume suprapopulata este locul ideal in care sa fii singur.

and socks."

He went with her without protest into the house, his dark head bobbing at the level of her waist. At the age of three, he showed no fear of the ultrasonic dryer in the kitchen. But before his mother could reach for a pair of slippers, he wriggled away and was gone into the silence of the house.

He would probably be looking for Teddy.

Monica Swinton, twenty-nine, of graceful shape and lambent eye, went and sat in her living room, arranging her limbs with taste. She began by sitting and thinking; soon she was just sitting. Time waited on her shoulder with the maniac slowness it reserves for children, the insane, and wives whose husbands are away improving the world. Almost by reflex, she reached out and changed the wavelength of her windows. The garden faded; in its place, the city center rose by her left hand, full of crowding people, blowboats, and buildings (but she kept the sound down). She remained alone. An overcrowded world is the

II

Directorii de la Synthank luau un pranz enorm pentru a celebra lansarea noului lor produs. Multi dintre ei purtau fete-masti din plastic, populare in acele timpuri. Toti erau de o suplete eleganta in ciuda mancarurilor si bauturilor copioase pe care le hapaiau. Sotiile lor erau de o suplete eleganta, in ciuda mancarurilor si bauturilor pe care si ele o hapaiau. O generatie timpurie si mai putin sofisticata i-ar fi considerat oameni frumosi, deosebiti de tot ce au vazut.

Henry Swinton, director administrativ la Synthank, era gata sa tina un discurs.

"Imi pare rau ca sotia ta n-a putut sa ni se alature pentru a te auzi," a spus vecinul lui.

"Monica prefera sa stea acasa, sa aiba ganduri frumoase," a spus Swinton, pastrandu-si zambetul.

"Este de asteptat ca o femeie atat de frumoasa sa aiba ganduri frumoase," a spus vecinul.

ideal place in which to be lonely.

II

The directors of Synthank were eating an enormous luncheon to celebrate the launching of their new product. Some of them wore the plastic face-masks popular at the time. All were elegantly slender, despite the rich food and drink they were putting away. Their wives were elegantly slender, despite the food and drink they too were putting away. An earlier and less sophisticated generation would have regarded them as beautiful people, apart from their eyes.

Henry Swinton, Managing Director of Synthank, was about to make a speech.

"I'm sorry your wife couldn't be with us to hear you," his neighbor said.

"Monica prefers to stay at home thinking beautiful thoughts," said Swinton, maintaining a smile.

"One would expect such a beautiful woman to have beautiful thoughts," said the

Ia-ti gandul de la sotia mea, nenorocitul, gandi swinton inca zambind.

S-a ridicat sa tina discursul printre aplauze.

Dupa cateva glume, a spus, "Ziua aceasta este marcata de o mare realizare pentru companie. Sunt aproape zece ani de cand am scos pe piata mondiala prima forma de viata sintetica. Cu totii stiti ce succes au avut, in special dinozaurul in miniatura. Dar nici unul nu a avut inteligenta."

"Pare un paradox ca in aceste zile si timpuri putem creea viata dar nu inteligenta. Prima noastra linie de succes, banda Crosswell, se vinde cel mai bine, si este cea mai stupida dintre toate." Toata lumea a ras.

"Desi trei patrimi din lumea super aglomerata flamanzeste, noi suntem norocosi sa avem mai mult decat ne trebuie, multumita controlului populatiei. Obezitatea este problema noastra, nu malnutritia. Presupun ca nu e nimeni la masa aceasta care sa nu aiba un Crosswell, muncind in

neighbor.

Take your mind off my wife, you bastard, thought Swinton, still smiling.

He rose to make his speech amid applause.

After a couple of jokes, he said, "Today marks a real breakthrough for the company. It is now almost ten years since we put our first synthetic life-forms on the world market. You all know what a success they have been, particularly the miniature dinosaurs. But none of them had intelligence.

"It seems like a paradox that in this day and age we can create life but not intelligence. Our first selling line, the Crosswell Tape, sells best of all, and is the most stupid of all." Everyone laughed.

"Though three-quarters of the overcrowded world are starving, we are lucky here to have more than enough, thanks to population control. Obesity's our problem, not malnutrition. I guess there's nobody round this table who doesn't have a Crosswell

intestinul subtire, un parazit perfect sigur (vierme banda) care ii da gazdei posibilitatea de a manca cu pana la 50% mai mult si totusi sa-si pastreze silueta. Nu-i asa?" Acorduri generale date din cap.

"Mini-dinozaurii nostri sunt aproape la fel de stupizi. Astazi, lansam o forma de viata sintetica inteligenta - un servitor in marime naturala."

"Nu numai ca este inteligent, dar are o cantitate controlata de inteligenta. Noi credem ca oamenilor le-ar fi teama sa se afle in preajma unui creier uman. Servitorul nostru are un computer micut in interiorul craniului."

"Au existat pe piata mecanisme cu mini-computere in loc de creier - lucruri plastice fata de viata, super-jucarii - dar am descoperit in sfarsit o metoda pentru a conecta circuitele computerului la un trup sintetic."

III

David statea langa fereastra lata din camera lui, luptandu-se cu hartia si creionul. Intr-un final, s-a oprit din scris si a

working for him in the small intestine, a perfectly safe parasite tape-worm that enables its host to eat up to fifty percent more food and still keep his or her figure. Right?" General nods of agreement.

"Our miniature dinosaurs are almost equally stupid. Today, we launch an intelligent synthetic life-form -- a full-size serving-man.

"Not only does he have intelligence, he has a controlled amount of intelligence. We believe people would be afraid of a being with a human brain. Our serving-man has a small computer in his cranium.

"There have been mechanicals on the market with mini-computers for brains -- plastic things without life, super-toys -- but we have at last found a way to link computer circuitry with synthetic flesh."

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David sat by the long window of his nursery, wrestling with paper and pencil. Finally, he

inceput sa rostogoleasca creionul in sus si in jos pe panta biroului.

"Teddy!" a spus el.

Teddy statea pe pat sprijinit de perete, sub o carte cu poze miscatoare si un soldat urias din plastic. Structura cuvântului din vocea stapanului l-a activat si s-a ridicat.

"Teddy, nu stiu ce sa spun."

Coborand din pat, ursul a mers teapan pana acolo si s-a prins de piciorul baiatului. David l-a ridicat si l-a asezat pe birou.

"Ce ai spus pana acum?"

"Am spus - " a ridicat scrisoarea si a privit-o intens. "Am spus, 'Draga Mami, sper ca esti bine acum. Te iubesc...'"

A urmat o tacere lunga pana cand ursul a spus, "Suna bine. Du-te jos si da-i-o."

Inca o tacere lunga.

"Nu este tocmai bine. Nu va intelege."

In interiorul ursului, un

stopped writing and began to roll the pencil up and down the slope of the desk-lid.

"Teddy!" he said.

Teddy lay on the bed against the wall, under a book with moving pictures and a giant plastic soldier. The speech-pattern of his master's voice activated him and he sat up.

"Teddy, I can't think what to say!"

Climbing off the bed, the bear walked stiffly over to cling to the boy's leg. David lifted him and set him on the desk.

"What have you said so far?"

"I've said --" He picked up his letter and stared hard at it. "I've said, 'Dear Mummy, I hope you're well just now. I love you....'"

There was a long silence, until the bear said, "That sounds fine. Go downstairs and give it to her."

Another long silence.

"It isn't quite right. She won't understand."

Inside the bear, a small

computer mic lucra in programul posibilitatilor. "De ce nu o scrii din nou colorat?"

Cand David nu a raspuns, ursul a repetat sugestia. "De ce nu o scrii din nou colorat?"

David se holba pe fereastra. "Teddy, stii la ce ma gandesc? Cum deosevesti lucrurile reale de cele care nu sunt reale?"

Ursul a combinat alternativele. "Lucrurile reale sunt bune."

"Ma intreb daca timpul este bun.

Nu cred ca lui Mami ii place timpul prea mult. Zilele trecute, multe zile in urma, spunea ca timpul trece pe langa ea. Timpul este real Teddy?"

"Ceasurile arata timpul. Ceasurile sunt reale. Mami are ceasuri, inseamna ca le place. Are un ceas la incheietura, langa cadran."

David se uita sa deseneze un avion urias pe spatele scrisorii. "Tu si cu mine suntem reali Teddy, nu-i asa?"

computer worked through its program of possibilities. "Why not do it again in crayon?"

When David did not answer, the bear repeated his suggestion. "Why not do it again in crayon?"

David was staring out of the window. "Teddy, you know what I was thinking? How do you tell what are real things from what aren't real things?"

The bear shuffled its alternatives. "Real things are good."

"I wonder if time is good.

I don't think Mummy likes time very much. The other day, lots of days ago, she said that time went by her. Is time real, Teddy?"

"Clocks tell the time. Clocks are real. Mummy has clocks so she must like them. She has a clock on her wrist next to her dial."

David started to draw a jumbo jet on the back of his letter. "You and I are real, Teddy, aren't we?"

The bear's eyes regarded the

Ochii ursului l-au privit pe baiat fara sovaiala. "Tu si cu mine suntem reali David." Se specializase in consolare.

Monica mergea incet prin casa. Era aproape timpul pentru posta de dupa-amiaza sa vina prin cablu. A apasat numarul oficiului postal pe cadranul de la incheietura, dar nimic nu a aparut. Inca cateva minute.

Putea sa-si ia pictura. Sau isi putea suna prietenii. Sau putea astepta ca Henry sa vina acasa. Sau putea merge sus sa se joace cu David....

A iesit in hol si a mers la marginea scarilor.

"David!"

Nici un raspuns. A mai strigat o data si o a treia oara.

"Teddy!" a strigat intr-un ton mai ascutit.

"Da Mami!" Dupa un moment de pauza, capul blamos si auriu al lui Teddy a aparut in capul scarilor.

"David este in camera lui Teddy?"

"David s-a dus in gradina

boy unflinchingly. "You and I are real David." It specialized in comfort.

Monica walked slowly about the house. It was almost time for the afternoon post to come over the wire. She punched the Post Office number on the dial on her wrist, but nothing came through. A few minutes more.

She could take up her painting. Or she could dial her friends. Or she could wait till Henry came home. Or she could go up and play with David....

She walked out into the hall and to the bottom of the stairs.

"David!"

No answer. She called again and a third time.

"Teddy!" she called, in sharper tones.

"Yes, Mummy!" After a moment's pause, Teddy's head of golden fur appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Is David in his room, Teddy?"

"David went into the garden,

Mami."

"Vino jos Teddy!"

A stat impasiva, privind figura micuta si blanoasa coborand treapta cu treapta pe membrele scurte si indesate. Cand a ajuns jos, l-a ridicat si l-a adus in camera de zi. Statea nemiscat in bratele ei, privind in sus la ea. Putea simti chiar si cea mai mica vibratie a motorului.

"Stai acolo Teddy. Vreau sa vorbesc cu tine." L-a asezat pe o masuta iar el a ramas precum i-a cerut, cu bratele inainte si deschise in eternul gest al imbratisarii.

"David ti-a spus sa-mi spui ca a plecat in gradina Teddy?"

Circuitele creierului ursului erau prea simple pentru artificii "Da Mami."

"Deci m-ai mintit."

"Da Mami."

"Inceteaza sa-mi mai spui Mami! De ce ma evita David? Nu-i este teama de mine, nu-i asa?"

"Nu. Te iubeste."

Mummy."

"Come down here, Teddy!"

She stood impassively, watching the little furry figure as it climbed down from step to step on its stubby limbs. When it reached the bottom, she picked it up and carried it into the living room. It lay unmoving in her arms, staring up at her. She could feel just the slightest vibration from its motor.

"Stand there, Teddy. I want to talk to you." She set him down on a tabletop, and he stood as she requested, arms set forward and open in the eternal gesture of embrace.

"Teddy, did David tell you to tell me he had gone into the garden?"

The circuits of the bear's brain were too simple for artifice. "Yes, Mummy."

"So you lied to me."

"Yes. Mummy."

"Stop calling me Mummy! Why is David avoiding me? He's not afraid of me, is he?"

"De ce nu putem comunica?"

"David este sus."

Raspunsul lui a incremenit-o. De ce sa piarda timpul vorbind cu aceasta masina? De ce sa nu mearga pur si simplu sus si sa-l stranga pe David in brate, sa vorbeasca cu el, asa cum o mama iubitoare ar face cu un fiu care o iubeste? A auzit greutatea apasatoare a linistii din casa, cu o calitate diferita de tacere rasfrangandu-se in fiecare camera. La etajul superior, ceva se misca foarte incet. David, incercand sa se ascunda de ea.

IV

Se apropia de finalul discursului acum. Oaspetii erau atenti; la fel era si presa, aliniata pe doi pereti sin incaperea banchetului, inregistrand cuvintele lui Henry si ocazional fotografiindu-l.

"Servitorul nostru va fi, in multe sensuri, un produs al computerului. Fara computere, nu am fi reusit niciodata sa lucram cu biochimicele sofisticate care merg in trupul sintetic.

"No. He loves you."

"Why can't we communicate?"

"David's upstairs."

The answer stopped her dead. Why waste time talking to this machine? Why not simply go upstairs and scoop David into her arms and talk to him, as a loving mother should to a loving son? She heard the sheer weight of silence in the house, with a different quality of silence pouring out of every room. On the upper landing, something was moving very silently -- David, trying to hide away from her....

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He was nearing the end of his speech now. The guests were attentive; so was the Press, lining two walls of the banqueting chamber, recording Henry's words and occasionally photographing him.

"Our serving-man will be, in many senses, a product of the computer. Without computers, we could never have worked through the

Servitorul va fi de asemenea o extensie a computerului - deoarece va avea un computer in propriul cap, un computer microminiaturizat, capabil sa se descurce in aproape orice situatie pe care ar putea-o intalni in casa. Cu rezervatii, bine-nteles." S-a ras aici; multi dintre cei prezenti cunosteau despredebaterea incinsa care a cuprins comitetul de conducere de la Synthank inainte ca decizia de a-l lasa pe servitor neutru in uniforma lui fara cusur sa fie luata.

"In ciuda tuturor triumfurilor civilizatiei noastre - da, si de asemenea in ciuda problemelor suprapopularii - este trist cand reflectam cate milioane de oameni sufera din cauza singuratatii si izolarii crescande. Servitorul nostru va fi o binefacere pentru ei; va raspunde intotdeauna, si cea mai insipida conversatie nu-l poate plictisi."

"Pentru viitor, planuim noi modele, barbati si femei - unii dintre ei fara limitatiile primului, va promit! - cu un design mai avansat, adevarate fiinte bio-electronice."

sophisticated biochemics that go into synthetic flesh. The serving-man will also be an extension of the computer-- for he will contain a computer in his own head, a microminiaturized computer capable of dealing with almost any situation he may encounter in the home. With reservations, of course." Laughter at this; many of those present knew the heated debate that had engulfed the Synthank boardroom before the decision had finally been taken to leave the serving-man neuter under his flawless uniform.

"Amid all the triumphs of our civilization -- yes, and amid the crushing problems of overpopulation too -- it is sad to reflect how many millions of people suffer from increasing loneliness and isolation. Our serving-man will be a boon to them: he will always answer, and the most vapid conversation cannot bore him.

"For the future, we plan more models, male and female-- some of them without the limitations of this first one, I promise you! -- of more

"Nu numai ca va avea propriul computer, capabil de programare individuala; vor fi conectati la Reteaua Mondiala de Date. Asa fiecare se va putea bucura de echivalentul unui Einstein in propria lor casa. Izolarea personala va fi eliminata pentru totdeauna!"

S-a asezat in aplauze entuziaste. Chiar si servitorul sintetic, ce statea la masa imbracat cu un costum discret, aplauda cu elan.

V

Tragandu-si ghiozdanul, David se furisa imprejurul casei. S-a urcat pe banca ornamentala de sub fereastră camerei de zi si privi prudent inaintre.

Mama lui statea in mijlocul camerei. Fata ei era impenetrabila; inexpresivitatea ei il speria. A privit fascinat. El nu se misca; ea nu se misca. Timpul s-ar fi putut opri, asa cum s-a oprit in gradina.

Intr-un final s-a intors si a parasit camera. Dupa ce a asteptat un moment, David a batut usor in geam. Teddy s-a

advanced design, true bio-electronic beings.

"Not only will they possess their own computer, capable of individual programming; they will be linked to the World Data Network. Thus everyone will be able to enjoy the equivalent of an Einstein in their own homes. Personal isolation will then be banished forever!" He sat down to enthusiastic applause. Even the synthetic serving-man, sitting at the table dressed in an unostentatious suit, applauded with gusto.

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Dragging his satchel, David crept round the side of the house. He climbed on to the ornamental seat under the living-room window and peeped cautiously in.

His mother stood in the middle of the room. Her face was blank, its lack of expression scared him. He watched fascinated. He did not move; she did not move. Time might have stopped, as it had stopped in the garden. At last she turned and left the room. After waiting a

uitat in jur, l-a vazut, s-a rostogolit de pe masa si a venit la fereastră. Dibuind cu labutele, a reusit pana la urma s-o deschida.

S-au uitat unul la altul.

"Nu-s bun de nimic Teddy. Hai sa fugim!"

"Esti un baietel foarte bun. Mamica ta te iubeste."

Incet, a dat din cap. "Daca ma iubeste, atunci de ce nu pot vorbi cu ea?"

"Esti caraghios David. Mami este singura. De aceea te-a avut."

"Il are pe Tati. Eu nu am pe nimeni in afara de tine, si sunt singur."

Teddy l-a batut prietenos pe cap. "Daca te simti atat de rau, mai bine ai merge din nou la psihiatru."

"Il urasc pe psihiatrul ala batran - ma face sa ma simt ca si cum nu as fi real." A inceput sa alerge de-a lungul pajistii. Ursul s-a rostogolit afara pe geam si l-a urmat atat de repede pe cat picioarele indesate i-au putut permite.

moment, David tapped on the window. Teddy looked round, saw him, tumbled off the table, and came over to the window. Fumbling with his paws, he eventually got it open.

They looked at each other.

"I'm no good, Teddy. Let's run away!"

"You're a very good boy. Your Mummy loves you."

Slowly, he shook his head. "If she loved me, then why can't I talk to her?"

"You're being silly, David. Mummy's lonely. That's why she had you."

"She's got Daddy. I've got nobody 'cept you, and I'm lonely."

Teddy gave him a friendly cuff over the head. "If you feel so bad, you'd better go to the psychiatrist again."

"I hate that old psychiatrist -- he makes me feel I'm not real." He started to run across the lawn. The bear toppled out of the window and followed as fast as its stubby legs would allow.

Monica Swinton era sus in dormitorul copilului. Si-a strigat fiul o data si pe urma a ramas in loc indecisa. Totul era tacut.

Creioane colorate stateau pe birou. Supunandu-se unui impuls de moment, a mers pana la birou si l-a deschis. Duzine de coli de hartie erau inauntru. Multe dintre ele erau facute in culori de scrisul stangaci al lui David, cu fiecare litera altfel colorata decat cea precedenta. Nici unul dintre mesaje nu era terminat.

"Draga mea Mami, cum te simti de fapt, ma iubesti la fel de mult--"

"Draga Mami, te iubesc pe tine si pe Tati si soarele straluceste--"

"Draga, draga Mami, Teddy ma ajuta sa-ti scriu. Te iubesc pe tine si pe Teddy--"

"Scumpa Mami, sunt singurul si unicul tau fiu si te iubesc atat de mult incat cateodata--"

"Draga Mami, tu esti cu adevarat Mami a mea si il urasc pe Teddy--"

Monica Swinton was up in the nursery. She called to her son once and then stood there, undecided. All was silent.

Crayons lay on his desk. Obeying a sudden impulse, she went over to the desk and opened it. Dozens of pieces of paper lay inside. Many of them were written in crayon in David's clumsy writing, with each letter picked out in a color different from the letter preceding it. None of the messages was finished.

"My dear Mummy, How are you really, do you love me as much --"

"Dear Mummy, I love you and Daddy and the sun is shining --"

"Dear dear Mummy, Teddy's helping me write to you. I love you and Teddy --"

"Darling Mummy, I'm your one and only son and I love you so much that some times --"

"Dear Mummy, you're really my Mummy and I hate Teddy --"

"Scumpa Mami, ghiceste cat de mult te iubesc--"

"Draga Mami, eu sunt baietelul tau, nu Teddy si te iubesc pe tine, nu pe Teddy--"

"Draga Mami, aceasta este o scrisoare pentru tine doar ca sa-ti spun cat de mult, intotdeauna cat de mult--"

Monica a scapat colile de hartie si a izbucnit in plans. Scrisorile in culori vesele, inexacte, s-au raspadit in evantai si s-au raspadit pe podea.

VI

Henry Swinton a luat expresul spre casa intr-o dispozitie foarte buna, ocazional spunand o vorba servitorului sintetic pe care il lua acasa cu el. Servitorul raspundea politicos si punctual, cu toate ca raspunsurile lui nu erau intotdeauna relevante conform standardelor umane.

Familia Swinton locuia intr-unul dintre cele mai bogate blocuri-oras, la jumatate de kilometru deasupra solului. Inconjurat de alte locuinte, apartamentul lor nu avea ferestre spre exterior; nimeni

"Darling Mummy, guess how much I love --"

"Dear Mummy, I'm your little boy not Teddy and I love you but Teddy --"

"Dear Mummy, this is a letter to you just to say how much how ever so much --"

Monica dropped the pieces of paper and burst out crying. In their gay inaccurate colors, the letters fanned out and settled on the floor.

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Henry Swinton caught the express home in high spirits, and occasionally said a word to the synthetic serving-man he was taking home with him. The serving-man answered politely and punctually, although his answers were not always entirely relevant by human standards.

The Swintons lived in one of the ritziest city-blocks, half a kilometer above the ground. Embedded in other apartments, their apartment had no windows to the outside; nobody wanted to see the overcrowded external world. Henry unlocked the door with his retina pattern-

nu dorea sa vada lumea exterioara super-aglomerata. Henry a deschis usa scanandu-si retina si intra urmat de servitor.

La inceput, Henry a fost inconjurat de iluzia prietenoasa a gradinilor aranjate intr-o vara eterna. Era surprinzator ce puteau face hologramele ca sa creeze miraje enorme in spatii mici. In spatele trandafirilor si a glicinei statea casa lor; inselaciunea era completa: un conac Georgian il intampina si-i ura bun venit.

"Cum iti place?" l-a intrebat pe servitor.

"Trandafirii sufera ocazional de pete negre."

"Trandafirii acestia sunt garantati sa nu aiba nici o imperfectiune."

"Este intotdeauna recomandabil sa achizitionezi bunuri cu garantie, chiar daca costa putin mai mult."

"Multumesc pentru informatie," a spus Henry sec. Formele de viata sintetice aveau mai putin de zece ani, vechiul android mecanic avea mai putin de

scanner and walked in, followed by the serving-man. At once, Henry was surrounded by the friendly illusion of gardens set in eternal summer. It was amazing what Whologram could do to create huge mirages in small spaces. Behind its roses and wisteria stood their house; the deception was complete: a Georgian mansion appeared to welcome him.

"How do you like it?" he asked the serving-man.

"Roses occasionally suffer from black spot."

"These roses are guaranteed free from any imperfections."

"It is always advisable to purchase goods with guarantees, even if they cost slightly more."

"Thanks for the information," Henry said dryly. Synthetic lifeforms were less than ten years old, the old android mechanicals less than sixteen; the faults of their systems were still being ironed out, year by year.

He opened the door and

saisprezece; greselile sistemului inca erau eliminate, an de an.

A deschis usa si a strigat-o pe Monica.

VII

A venit imediat din salon si l-a cuprins in brate, sarutandu-l cu ardoare pe obraz si pe buze. Henry era uimit.

Tragandu-se in spate pentru a se uita la fata ei, a vazut cum parea sa genereze lumina si frumuseti. Trecura luni de cand o mai vazuse atat de emotionata. Instinctiv, a strans-o mai tare.

"Draga mea, ce s-a intamplat?"

"Henry, Henry - oh, dragule, eram disperata ... dar tocmai am sunat la posta de dupa-amiaza si- nu o sa-ti vina sa crezi! Oh, este minunat!"

"Pentru numele lui Dumnezeu, femeie, spune ce-i minunat?"

A zarit antetul fotostatului din mana ei, inca umed de la recipientul din perete: Ministerul Populatiei. A simtit culoarea disparandu-i de pe

called to Monica.

She came out of the sitting-room immediately and flung her arms round him, kissing him ardently on cheek and lips. Henry was amazed.

Pulling back to look at her face, he saw how she seemed to generate light and beauty. It was months since he had seen her so excited. Instinctively, he clasped her tighter.

"Darling, what's happened?"

"Henry, Henry -- oh, my darling, I was in despair ... but I've just dialed the afternoon post and -- you'll never believe it! Oh, it's wonderful!"

"For heaven's sake, woman, what's wonderful?"

He caught a glimpse of the heading on the photostat in her hand, still moist from the wall-receiver: Ministry of Population. He felt the color drain from his face in sudden shock and hope.

"Monica ... oh ... Don't tell me

fata din cauza socului si a sperantei.

"Monica ... oh ... Nu-mi spune ca numarul nostru a fost extras!"

"Da, dragul meu, da, am castigat loteria parintilor de saptamana aceasta. Putem merge sa concepem un copil chiar acum!"

A lasat sa-i scape un strigat de bucurie. Au dansat imprejurul camerei. Presiunea populatiei era intratat de mare incat reproductia trebuia strict controlata. Nasterea copiilor necesita permisiunea guvernului. Pentru aceasta clipa au asteptat patru ani. Incoerent si-au plans bucuria.

S-au oprit intr-un final, gafaind si stand in mijlocul camerei pentru a rade de bucuria celui alt. Cand a coborat din dormitorul copilului, Monica a aranjat ferestrele, astfel incat acum lasau sa se vada panorama gradinii de dincolo. Lumina artificiala a soarelui era mai aurie si se lungea peste pajiste - iar David si Teddy se uitau la ei prin fereastra.

Vazandu-le fetele, Henry si

our number's come up!"

"Yes, my darling, yes, we've won this week's parenthood lottery! We can go ahead and conceive a child at once!"

He let out a yell of joy. They danced round the room. Pressure of population was such that reproduction had to be strict, controlled. Childbirth required government permission. For this moment, they had waited four years. Incoherently they cried their delight.

They paused at last, gasping and stood in the middle of the room to laugh at each other's happiness. When she had come down from the nursery, Monica had de-opaquet the windows so that they now revealed the vista of garden beyond. Artificial sunlight was growing long and golden across the lawn -- and David and Teddy were staring through the window at them.

Seeing their faces, Henry and his wife grew serious.

"What do we do about them?" Henry asked.

"Teddy's no trouble. He works well."

sotia lui au devenit seriosi.

"Ce ne facem cu ei?" a intrebat Henry.

"Teddy nu ne face probleme. Functioneaza bine."

"David s-a stricat?"

"Centrul verbal de comunicare inca ii face probleme. Cred ca va trebui dus din nou la fabrica."

"Bine. Vom vedea cum se poarta pana se naste copilul. Ceea ce-mi aminteste - am o surpriza pentru tine: ajutorul iti vine exact cand ai nevoie de el! Haide in hol sa vezi ce am luat."

In timp ce adultii dispareau din camera, baiatul si ursul sedeau printre trandafirii standard.

"Teddy - presupun ca Mami si Tati sunt reali, nu-i asa?"

Teddy a spus, "Pui asemenea intrebari caraghioase David. Nimeni nu stie ce inseamna de fapt 'real'! Hai inauntru."

"Mai intai imi iau un alt trendafir!" Rupand o floare de un roz aprins, a dus-o cu el in casa. Putea sta pe perna in

"Is David malfunctioning?"

"His verbal communication center is still giving trouble. I think he'll have to go back to the factory again."

"Okay. We'll see how he does before the baby's born. Which reminds me--I have a surprise for you: help just when help is needed! Come into the hall and see what I've got."

As the two adults disappeared from the room, boy and bear sat down beneath the standard roses.

"Teddy -- I suppose Mummy and Daddy are real, aren't they?"

Teddy said, "You ask such silly questions, David. Nobody knows what real really means. Let's go indoors."

"First I'm going to have another rose!" Plucking a bright pink flower, he carried it with him into the house. It could lie on the pillow as he went to sleep. Its beauty and softness reminded him of Mummy.

timp ce el adormea.
Frumusetea si delicatetea lui
ii aminteau de Mami.